

AUSTIN'S DOWNTOWN ALLEYS

Activating public open spaces



Presentation to the Austin City Council Comprehensive Planning and Transportation Committee, by the Austin Downtown Commission's Alley Activation Workgroup
February 3, 2014

Austin's Downtown Alleys



Directly supports Downtown Austin Plan

- A **dense and livable pattern of development** that supports a vibrant day and nighttime environment.
- An **interconnected pattern of streets, parks, and public spaces** that instill a unique sense of place and community.
- A **beloved fabric of historic places**, buildings, and landscapes that celebrate the unique journey Austin has taken over the past 200 years.
- An **array of innovative businesses** – small and large – that are attracted to Downtown by its rich human capital and unique sense of place.
- A **variety of districts and destinations** that support the creative expression of Austin's citizenry through art, music, theater, dance, and performance.

Austin's Downtown Alleys Today



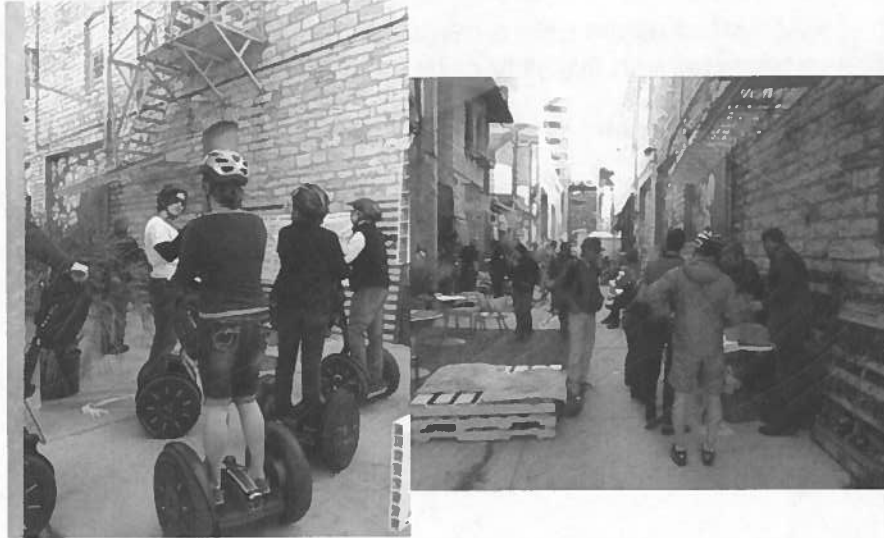
Why Activate Austin's Alleyways?

- Activated alleys play a central role in enhancing the character and livability of dense urban areas.
- Provide a diverse range of public spaces.
- Can respond to a broad range of users.
- Support economic development.
- Support layered functions – utilitarian and commercial.

Activating Alley 111: 20ft Wide



Activating Alley 111: 20ft Wide



Activating Alley 111: 20ft Wide



Activating Alley 111:
20ft Wide



Activating Alley 111: 20ft Wide



Logistics/Challenges to Address

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy concentration of dumpsters • Poor lighting • Special events permits <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barricade requirement • Traffic engineer-certified parking control plan • Requirement to hire police • 180-day permit review period | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodating services: delivery trucks, dumpster trucks • Access to electricity • Wayfinding • Funding • Parking (legally and illegally) |
|---|---|

Potential for Future Alley Activations

- Improving **public safety and beautification** of downtown.
- Providing opportunities for **engaging public spaces**—places for people to visit, relax, and enjoy being with other people.
- Celebrating **visual and performing arts** by creating areas to showcase the work of local artists.
- Expanding the **pedestrian network and connectivity** to other parts of downtown.
- Highlighting **historical assets**.
- Providing **intimate retail zones**.

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© Alley Network Project, Seattle

San Francisco



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New York City Artist's Alley

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- Highlighting **historical assets**.
- Providing **intimate retail zones**.



Melbourne Laneway
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Seville



Learning from other cities

- Fort Collins, Colorado
- Melbourne, Australia
- San Francisco, California
- Sydney, Australia
- Seattle, Washington
- Chicago, Illinois
- Los Angeles, California
- Brisbane, Australia
- Perth, Australia



Learning from other cities

- Grants to small businesses to locate in alleys (e.g., Melbourne, Sydney)
- City-sponsored walking tours of alleys (e.g., Sydney)



Melbourne, Australia

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Leigh/J/M

Learning from other cities

- Clear Alleys Program to address dumpsters (e.g., Seattle)
- Local collaborations among property owners and city (e.g., Los Angeles)
- Commissioning artists for alley art (e.g., Melbourne's Laneways Commission Program, NYC, Sydney, Seattle)



Sydney, Australia

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Learning from other cities

- Alley Master Plan (e.g., Fort Collins, CO; Birmingham, AL)
- Development of height limits and set backs for new development along alleys (e.g., San Francisco, Sydney)
- New lighting, paving, signs, and other physical improvements (many examples)



Policy Recommendations

- **Downtown Plan Amendment:** Add policy goal of establishing a program, with support of surrounding businesses, to renovate and enhance downtown alleys to serve as lively pedestrian walkways, new spaces for artists and small businesses, and vibrant gathering spaces.

Policy Recommendations

- **Alley Master Plan:** (1) identify and classify alleys based on potential for activation; (2) establish design guidelines and enhancement strategies; (3) create implementation plan with prioritization for capital improvements that could plug into CIP process. See Birmingham, AL, and Fort Collins, CO .

Policy Recommendations

- **Catalyst Activation Projects:**
Create two catalyst alley activation projects. Rainey underway + second project
- **Dumpsters:** While preserving role of alleys for trash pick up, create a program to remove and consolidate trash dumpsters in alleys and, over time, change the appearance of remaining dumpsters to make them more attractive. See Seattle Clear Alleys program.



Policy Recommendations

- **Names for Alleys:** Adopt a process for naming Austin's downtown alleys and creating street signs at entrances of the alleys. See San Francisco.



Policy Recommendations

- **Design Standards:** Adopt design standards or guidelines for new development along alleys to address "back side" of buildings. See San Francisco



Policy Recommendations

- **City Staff:** Develop a plan for how city staff could support temporary and permanent alley activation projects. See San Francisco
- **City Permits:** Evaluate changes to City's special events permit process for impact on alley activation events: barricade and police requirements, expenses, etc.

Policy Recommendations

- **Small Businesses:** Create a grant and loan program to facilitate the location of small businesses in alleys. See Sydney, Australia
- **Public Art:** Secure and dedicate funds for public art in alleys, both temporary and permanent. See Sydney and Melbourne, Australia (Laneways commission Program).



Questions/Discussion

Heather K. Way

Vice Chair, Downtown Commission

Hway.austin@gmail.com

Chris Jackson

Member, Downtown Commission Alley Activation
Workgroup

Chris.jackson@tbg-inc.com